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ABSTRACT

The 1974 book, "The Uses of Mass Communication: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research" introduced the concept of a "division of labor"--that certain media work better than others in meeting audience gratifications. Since the division of labor concept has not been subjected to empirical testing, a study elaborated an empirical test of the division of labor concept, through statistical analysis of survey data. College students were asked to rate the usefulness of specific media in satisfying specific gratifications--entertainment and informational. The resultant data enhances the understanding of how younger audience members select media. The emergence of Internet technologies, conceptually placed between print and broadcast, suggested the following hypotheses to test the concept: (1) For entertainment-related gratifications, audience members prefer television most, followed by Internet, then newspapers; and (2) For information-related gratifications, audience members prefer newspapers most, followed by Internet, then television. To test the hypotheses, a population of 1808 students at a private North Carolina university was surveyed about their media use. A total of 320 usable surveys were returned, for a response rate of 17.7%. The two hypotheses predicted the existence of a "division of labor" with certain media "working" better to meet specific gratifications than others. Hypothesis 1 was not supported, while Hypothesis 2 was supported by the data. A third hypothesis which predicted that a respondent's perceptions of greater utility of a specific medium would be statistically related to greater use of that medium was mainly supported. Survey results partially supported the "division of labor" concept. (Contains 7 tables of data, 24 references, and 8 notes.) (NKA)

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WHATEVER WORKS

A Test of the "Division of Labor" Component of Uses and Gratifications Theory

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WHATEVER WORKS

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INTRODUCTION

As the Internet has evolved, it has attracted the attention of many researchers. The diffusion of this new technology provides mass communication scholars with a rare opportunity -- to study a new medium as it is adopted by the audience. Several theoretical approaches inform studies into this emerging technology. One of particular relevance to the study of on-line technologies is the uses and gratifications approach.

Mass communications scholars had been studying the interplay between audience members' psycho-social needs and their media choices for several decades. By 1974, the approach gained a measure of theoretical and methodological coherence through the volume *The Uses of Mass Communication: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research*, edited by Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz. The approach (which receives a more thorough explanation in the literature review) introduced the concept of a "division of labor" – that certain media work better than others in meeting audience gratifications. It was predicted, for example, that television would be perceived as more useful for entertainment-related

gratifications, while print media would be perceived as more useful for information-related gratifications.

The "division of labor" concept has not been subjected to empirical testing, however. Most previous studies compared the various gratifications met by a single medium (for examp e, Cohen, Levy, and Golden, 1988; Beinhoff, 1997; and Harwood, 1999). The purpose of these descriptive studies was to compare the various gratifications met by the specific medium, incorporating a variety of independent variables.

This paper provides such an empirical test of the "division of labor" concept, through statistical analysis of survey data. In the survey, college students were asked to rate the usefulness specific media in satisfying specific gratifications -- entertainment and informational. The resultant data enhances our understanding of how younger audience members select media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When Lazarsfeld published his seminal study on the 1940 presidential campaign (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1944), most scholars assumed that his purpose was to refute the "magic bullet" theory that was popular at the time. Given the strong mass communications emphasis at Columbia University, where Lazarsfeld served on the faculty, it is also reasonable to assume that he was seeking long-term, indirect influences of psychological and social factors (Wright, 1986).

The influence of such factors had been described in several studies from the 1940s and 1950s (Herzog, 1944; Berelson, 1949; Freidson, 1953). Several studies from the 1950s added a predictive component, as researchers sought factors that influenced media or content selection, or their response to the content (Riley and Riley, 1951, 1959). Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) suggested that interpersonal relationships should serve as an intervening variable in the mass communication process. Even that research, however, focused on responses such as attitude change as the valid measure of media effects. As subsequent research would demonstrate, more long-term, subtle – though still strong – effects could be found by studying the audience member's perceptions of media's usefulness in meeting psychological and social gratifications.

Blumler and Katz's volume (1974) helped promote this fruitful avenue of research. In the introductory chapter (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974), the approach was described as examining

> the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities) resulting in need gratifications and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974, p. 20).

The authors distinguished five elements within the approach: the concept of the active, goal-oriented audience; focus on individual audience members rather than media; the concept of displacement, which looked at media use as a choice within several options; the acceptance of self-reporting as a research methodology; and a suspension of value judgments about the value of media.

The evolution of media typologies were considered indicators of a uses and gratifications "division of labor" within media (Blumler and Katz, 1974). Lasswell's (1948) media function typology identified surveillance, correlation, entertainment and cultural transmission. McQuail, Blumler, and Brown (1972) suggested gratification-oriented functions: diversion, personal relationships, personal reference, and surveillance. One suggestion for future research was that this "division of labor" concept be subjected to empirical testing to determine whether, in fact, different media "worked" better than others at meeting specific gratifications. For example, would print media work better than broadcast media in satisfying information gratifications? Would broadcast work better than print in satisfying entertainment gratifications?

The emergence of Internet technologies, conceptually placed between print and broadcast, suggest the following two hypotheses, to test the "division of labor" concept:

Hypothesis 1: For entertainment-related gratifications, audience members prefer television most, followed by Internet, and then newspapers.

Hypothesis 2: For information-related gratifications, audience members prefer newspapers most, followed by Internet, and then television.

For the division of labor to exist, practice must follow preference; in other words, audience members should not only indicate a preference for a medium, but also report greater use of that medium. This closely relates to the expectancy-value approach (Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rosengren, 1985), an innovation within uses and gratifications research. This approach attempts to measure the audience

member's motivation in seeking gratifications from certain media. Audience members are more motivated to seek certain kinds of information from certain media; if that gratification is satisfied, the particular medium is reinforced in the audience member's mind, and the audience member is that much more likely to select that medium when seeking that gratification.

Consistently, researchers have found relationships between perceptions of the utility of an individual medium and use of that medium (Greenberg, 1974; O'Keefe and Sulanowski, 1995; Perse and Dunn, 1998). For example, Rubin (1979) found significant positive correlations between television viewing and each television use category. Wachter and Kelly (1998) found a positive, significant relationship between videocassette recorder usage and stated satisfaction with VCR viewing as a leisure activity. That relationship of expected gratifications to level of use is hypothesized, and will be tested, as follows:

> *Hypothesis 3: Greater perception of a medium's utility is related to greater use of that medium. In other words, respondents who report higher usage of an individual medium also assign greater utility to that medium toward a variety of gratifications.*

METHODOLOGY

To test the hypotheses, a population of students at a private university in North Carolina was surveyed about their media use. Although some critics have expressed skepticism toward self-reporting methodologies, such surveys have been a popular means of acquiring media use data (Johnstone, 1974; Stempel and

Hargrove, 1995). Subsequent research has supported the validity of the method, even in surveying children (Rubin, 1979).

Sampling and Data Collection. Because the university had an enrollment of approximately 2,300 students the semester the study was conducted, a survey was sent to every undergraduate student under the age of 24. Other aspects of the research studied how younger people learned to use the Internet, so it was deemed wisest to exclude graduate/professional and non-traditional undergraduate students.

A total of 1,808 undergraduate students[1], both on-campus and off-campus, received surveys. Surveys were mailed between March 31 and April 1, 1999, with reminder postcards sent two weeks later. A total of 320 usable surveys were returned, for a response rate of 17.7 percent. Of the surveys received, 14 were discarded as unusable, mainly because they were filled out by respondents who did not belong to the desired sample in terms of age (between 18 and 23) or education level (undergraduate students)[2].

Instrument Design. The sampling instrument, a survey, incorporated uses and gratifications-related statements that had been used on previous surveys of mass communication technologies (Greenberg, 1974; Rubin, 1979: Cohen, Golden, and Levy, 1988; O'Keefe and Sulanowski, 1995; Kaye, 1996; Beinhoff, 1997). Of

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[1]Of that total, 1,285 were on-campus residents, and 523 lived off-campus.

[2]Although the response rate might seem low, the size of the population surveyed – 1,808 students – resulted in a sample adequate for comparison. The purpose of this study was not generalization to the population as a whole, but meaningful comparison within a sample.

particular relevance to this study was the fact that many of the previous studies surveyed students at various levels of schooling. The survey was presented in the form of a five-item Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Students circled the appropriate choice on the survey.

Three of the statements related to instrumental/information media uses[3]:

1-I. It helps me find out things that affect people like myself (Greenberg, 1974; Rubin, 1979).

2-I. It helps me to make decisions (O'Keefe and Sulanowski, 1995; Beinhoff, 1997).

3-I. It helps me to be a better student (Cohen, Golden, and Levy, 1988).

Three of the statements related to escapist/entertainment uses:

1-E. It allows me to forget my troubles (Greenberg, 1974; Rubin, 1979).

2-E. It entertains me (O'Keefe and Sulanowski, 1995; Perse and Dunn, 1998).

3-E. It helps me to unwind (Greenberg, 1974; Cohen, Golden, and Levy, 1988).

For comparison purposes, students rated three media – television, newspaper, and the Internet[4] – on each statement. That allowed a measurement of the students' perception of each medium's ability to provide the stated

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[3]The survey included other items; only those that contributed to this paper are included. For a copy of the complete survey, please contact the author.

[4]On the survey, "the Internet" was defined as referring to "technologies that link your computer to computers in other locations, sometimes very distant."

gratifications. To enhance the comparison, each statement was followed by the media choices. That format was chosen, rather than dispersing use statements pertaining to each medium throughout the survey, to allow the respondents to distinguish between each medium in meeting the stated use.

Subsequent questions also asked the respondent about the number of hours each day spent on the Internet and watching television. In both cases, respondents chose from answer categories provided. In asking about newspaper reading habits, respondents provided the number of days a week the respondent read a daily newspaper. These items would be used to examine whether perceived utility of a medium related to use of that medium.

Limitations. Several design factors limit the generalizability of the findings. The young age of the sample and its limited geographic scope are among these limitations. Because the survey that provides the data for this study dealt with Internet use, respondents who are not interested in the Internet would be more likely to ignore the survey; *this self-selection of respondents resulted in a sample* that would not represent even the student body at the campus where the study took place.

RESULTS

Division of Labor. The two hypotheses predicted the existence of a "division of labor," with certain media "working" better to meet specific gratifications than others. The first hypothesis predicted that for information gratifications,

newspapers would rank first, followed by Internet and then television. The second hypothesis predicted that for entertainment gratifications, television would rank first, followed by the Internet and then television. To test the hypotheses, the rank-order of mean values for the agree-disagree statements were compared, according to medium.

Hypothesis 1 was not supported. For information-related gratifications (Table 1), the students ranked television first for Statement 1 ("It helps me find out things that affect people like myself"), and the Internet first for Statement 4 ("It helps me to make decisions") and Statement 7 ("It helps me to be a better student"). In all three cases, newspaper reading ranked third.

Hypothesis 2 was supported by the data. As also demonstrated in Table 1, for all three entertainment-related gratification statements – Statement 3 ("It allows me to forget my troubles"), Statement 6 ("It entertains me") and Statement 7 ("It helps me to unwind") – television ranked first in mean value, followed by the Internet and then newspapers. (Table 1 goes here.)

Media Use and Perceived Utility. The students reported varying levels of media use, as demonstrated by the following tables for Internet use, television viewing, and newspaper reading. Typically, most students reported spending less than an hour per day using the Internet's various technologies. (Table 2 goes here.)

The students also gave responses that indicated a high diffusion of new media computer technologies: When asked to identify which Internet-related technologies they had used in the past week, 87.3 percent reported using the World

Wide Web, 84.3 percent reported using e-mail, 29.7 percent reported participating on a chat line, and 2.3 percent reported using AOL Instant Messaging. In addition, two students reported participating in newsgroups, two reported using telnet, and one each reported using videochat, on-line databases, and file transfer protocol.

Television viewing remains a popular pastime of college students, with more than a third reporting that they viewed at least two hours of television each day. (Table 3 goes here.) .

Daily newspaper reading, however, was much less frequent. Less than half of the students surveyed reported reading a newspaper more than once a week. The distribution is positively skewed, with a mean of 1.95, meaning that the respondents, on average, read a daily newspaper almost two days out of a typical week. The results are comparable to those found by Schlagheck (1998), who found that 80 percent of her study's respondents had read a daily newspaper within the past week[5]. (Table 4 goes here.)

The third hypothesis predicted that a respondent's perceptions of greater utility of a specific medium would be statistically related to greater use of that medium. To test this hypothesis, correlations were measured between variables on media use and scores on the agree/disagree statements related to each medium.

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[5]Further statistical comparisons could not be performed. Schlagheck asked respondents to give the date when they had last read a newspaper; the survey for this dissertation asked students to estimate how many days they read a newspaper within a typical week.

The hypothesis was mainly supported. In almost every case, the strongest positive correlation was noted between the statement about perceived utility of a specific medium and reported use of that medium.

Statements reflecting perceived utility of the Internet positively correlated most strongly with Internet use in every case except one, and all six correlations were statistically significant. (Table 5 goes here.) The statement "[The Internet] helps me to be a better student" positively correlated more strongly with newspaper reading than with Internet use. This could be explained by the fact that students who use the Internet are active readers, and see the Internet in that context when considering its usefulness to their academic pursuits.

In the same way, statements reflecting perceived utility of newspapers correlated most strongly with newspaper reading in every case except one, although only five of the six positive correlations were significant -- one fewer than with Internet use. (See Table 6.) However, for that one statement --"It allows me to forget my troubles" -- a statistically significant relationship was not noted with any medium. Perhaps those who read newspapers most often do not consider any medium as having utility in meeting that gratification.

For television, the correlations were the weakest of the three media. Statements reflecting perceived utility of television did positively correlate most strongly with television viewing in six of eight cases, one fewer than the Internet or newspapers, and in one of those six cases, the correlation was not statistically significant for any medium. (See Table 7.) The statement, "[Television viewing]

helps me to be a better student," correlated most strongly with more frequent newspaper reading. The statement, "[Television viewing] makes me feel more confident," correlated more strongly with more frequent use of the Internet. Perhaps the results can be best interpreted in terms of the students' doubts about the utility of television in each statement, than in terms of the alternative medium's utility.

DISCUSSION

This study operated under the hypothesis that audience members consider different media more useful for different gratifications, and a positive relationship exists between a person's perception of the usefulness of a specific medium and his or her use of that medium. Within these perceptions, a "division of labor" exists: Audience members consider newspapers most useful for information-related gratifications, followed by the Internet and television. They consider television most useful for entertainment-related gratifications, followed by the Internet and newspapers.

The survey results partially supported the "division of labor" concept. These results indicated that, to an extent, a "division of labor" exists. Blumler and Katz (1974) predicted that television would rank ahead of newspapers in meeting entertainment-related gratifications, and that newspapers would rank ahead of television in meeting information-related gratifications. The author modified this

model by inserting the Internet as a "bridge" between the two media, in terms of gratifications met. In this study, for entertainment-related gratifications, students consistently preferred television, followed by the Internet and newspapers. For information-related gratifications, the results were less consistent, and newspapers did not rank as highly as Blumler and Katz (1974) might have predicted.

The concept of a "division of labor" – of print and broadcast media "working" better to meet specific gratifications – loses its definition when the Internet is introduced. The Internet provides audience members with both the entertainment of television or radio (popular music-related sites) and the information of print (academic research, Web newspapers and magazines).

A central tenet of uses and gratifications research is supported: that audience members choose specific media based on (among other factors) how well they perceive that medium will meet their gratifications. This supports the concept of the active audience, in opposition to the outmoded image of the audience member as helpless, passive participants in the media consumption process.

As Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) stated, audience members approach their media consumption with specific psychological and social goals in mind. Part of these media-related decisions involve which medium best fulfills that psychological or social goal, whether entertainment, information, escape, social interaction, or even mere relaxation. The Internet deserves consideration as an option within this process, because audience members themselves have included it,

as reflected in both the amount of time they devote to Internet use and the gratifications they report that they expect to receive from it.

A relevant implication of this study is that students do not yet cite newspapers as a preferred source for information-related gratifications, even as they consistently selected television for entertainment-related gratifications, as Hypothesis 1 predicted. Such information should not be surprising, given previous studies that indicate declining newspaper readership among college-age audience members (Stempel and Hargrove, 1995; Schlagheck, 1998). As students mature, they might turn to newspapers more for information; perhaps the diffusion of the Internet will siphon off this segment of the audience, albeit to Web sites operated by print media providers.

The nature of these information-related gratifications as they apply to college students might also have affected the results. Traditionally, information-related gratifications have been defined in terms of news; audience members choose newspapers to give them more information concerning news related to government, foreign affairs, and lifestyles. To a college student, however, information-related gratifications are also strongly defined in the context of academic tasks – research papers, class preparation, and the like. Many colleges offer academic databases and other tools on the Internet, making it a popular tool for students working on academic projects, and the students have enthusiastically embraced the new technology. That would change the nature of the information-related gratification in the audience members' minds.

Confirming previous studies, the results also indicated a positive relationship between the amount of time a person reported using a specific medium and his or her perception of that medium's usefulness in meeting specific gratifications (Greenberg, 1974; Rubin, 1979; O'Keefe and Sulanowski, 1995; Perse and Dunn, 1998). It is interesting to note that students sought different gratifications from different media -- no single medium was the exclusive choice of all of the students. However, for almost all gratifications, even within these varying divisions of labor, the students were more likely to use those specific media that they found most useful.

Both hypotheses reflect important components of uses and gratifications research, because it affirms the concept of the active audience. Mass media audience members are not as passive in their media behavior as some critics might fear; they have learned to seek specific gratifications from specific media of their own choosing, basing these choices on the results of previous choices. Where students and the Internet are concerned, this active seeking takes on a new dimension; the students not only know how to meet these gratifications, but they also know how to learn new ways to use the Internet in meeting gratifications. Thus, the situation takes on a dynamic that evolves along with the Internet itself.

It is also worth noting that the Internet has found a secure place within young people's selection of media choices. Previous researchers have noted the unique nature of new computer-mediated technologies and have wondered whether the Internet's interactivity or two-way communication limit its usefulness as a mass

medium. To college students, however, the Internet is as reliable a source of media gratification – whether for information or entertainment – as the more traditional media. In addition, the students in the focus groups expressed an adeptness at choosing from the Internet's various functions (one-way vs. two-way, entertainment vs. information) as their needs changed.

Suggestions for further research. An additional focus of research could involve how the audience member's media use evolves through various levels of maturation. According to previous research, older audience members read more than younger audience members. Apparently, then, the "division of labor" suggested by Blumler and Katz is not immutable, and audience members's perception of specific media working best to meet specific gratifications changes with time. Students' medium of choice for information purposes probably changes as they mature. Tracing this evolution, however, could be a difficult process, especially with the diffusion of the Internet.

Other media perceptions are evolving. Even the act of reading the newspaper is changing. Many students might not read a traditional ink-on-paper newspaper, but many reported going to World Wide Web sites operated by newspapers.

Table 1
Perceptions of Utility According to Medium
(Ranking Among Media in Parentheses Below)
Undergraduate college students[6]

Statement	Internet Use	Television Viewing	Newspaper Reading
"It helps me find out things that affect people like myself" (information)	3.82 (3)	4.04 (1)	3.90 (2)
"It helps me to make decisions" (information)	3.41 (1)	3.24 (3)	3.33 (2)
"It helps me to be a better student" (information)	4.06 (1)	2.94 (3)	3.82 (2)
"It allows me to forget my troubles" (entertainment)	2.96 (2)	3.23 (1)	2.41 (3)
"It entertains me" (entertainment)	4.14 (2)	4.49 (1)	3.25 (3)
"It helps me to unwind" (entertainment)	3.51 (2)	4.22 (1)	3.10 (3)

[6]The size of the sample for the statistics in Tables 4-6 ranged from 302 to 306.

Table 2
How many hours a day do you use the Internet?
Undergraduate college students (n=306)

Hours per day	Frequency	Percentage
0-1 hours[7]	184	60.1
1-2 hours	91	29.7
2-4 hours	24	7.8
More than 4 hours	7	2.3
TOTAL	306	100.0

Table 3
How many hours a day do you watch television?
Undergraduate college students (n=306)

Hours per day	Frequency	Percentage
0-1 hours	120	39.2
1-2 hours	75	24.5
2-3 hours	54	17.6
3-5 hours	48	15.7
More than 5 hours	9	2.9
TOTAL	306	100.0

[7]It should be recognized that a few of the students who marked "0-1 hours" intended to report that they do not use the Internet at all. (See Table 7.)

Table 4
How many days a week do you read a daily newspaper?
Undergraduate college students (n=303)

Days per week	Frequency	Percentage
0 days	77	25.4
1 day	88	29.0
2 days	52	17.0
3 days	27	8.8
4 days	19	6.2
5 days	15	5.0
6 days	7	2.3
7 days	18	5.9
TOTAL	303	100.0

Table 5[8]
Correlation Between Perceived Utility of the Internet and Frequency of Use of All Three Media Undergraduate college students (n=306)

Statement about the Internet	Internet Use	Newspaper Reading	Television Viewing
"It helps me find out things that affect people like myself"	.143*	.075	-.108
"It allows me to forget my troubles"	.312**	-.035	-.004
"It helps me to make decisions"	.156**	.056	.031
"It entertains me"	.295**	.035	.030
"It helps me to unwind"	.382**	.024	.001
"It helps me to be a better student"	.131*	.160**	.076

* – $p<.05$, ** – $p<.01$

[8]Note that with Tables 4-6, the medium to which each statement refers is placed in the first column, to make comparison easier.

Table 6
Correlation Between Perceived Utility of Newspapers and Frequency of Use of All Three Media
Undergraduate college students (n=306)

Statement about newspapers	Newspaper Reading	Internet Use	Television Viewing
"It helps me find out things that affect people like myself"	.128*	-.010	-.040
"It allows me to forget my troubles"	.082	.094	.056
"It helps me to make decisions"	.216**	.165**	.071
"It entertains me"	.295**	-.043	.019
"It helps me to unwind"	.297**	.033	-.035
"It helps me to be a better student"	.316**	.025	.020

* – $p<.05$, ** – $p<.01$

Table 7
Correlation Between Perceived Utility of Television and Frequency of Use of All Three Media
Undergraduate college students (n=306)

Statement about television	Television Viewing	Internet Use	Newspaper Reading
"It helps me find out things that affect people like myself"	.200**	-.008	.029
"It gives me information to pass along to others"	.119*	.066	.090
"It allows me to forget my troubles"	.097	.071	-.042
"It helps me to make decisions"	.213**	.135*	.147*
"It entertains me"	.220**	.096	.040
"It helps me to unwind"	.215**	.113*	.090
"It helps me to be a better student"	.195**	.095	.224**
"It makes me feel more confident"	.145*	.158**	.125*

* – $p<.05$, ** – $p<.01$

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